

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
POST OFFICE BOX 98000
BATON ROUGE, LA 70898-9000

Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Nov. 10-12, 2009
Catahoula Lake: Nov. 5, 2009
NW LA: Nov. 4, NE LA: Nov. 5-6

November 16, 2009

Reported By: L. Reynolds, J. Olszak, S. Smith,
D. Butcher and J. Hughes
Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	12,000	2,000		14,000
MOTTLED	46,000	24,000		70,000
GADWALL	293,000	63,000	**	356,000
WIGEON	3,000	**		3,000
GW TEAL	136,000	20,000		156,000
BW TEAL	537,000	61,000		598,000
SHOVELER	51,000	**		51,000
PINTAIL	56,000	**		56,000
TOTAL DABLERS	1,134,000	170,000	-	1,304,000
SCAUP	2,000			2,000
RINGNECKED	31,000		4,000	35,000
CANVASBACK			3,000	3,000
TOTAL DIVERS	33,000		7,000	40,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,167,000	170,000	7,000	1,344,000
COOTS	164,000	196,000		360,000

**Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 1.34 million ducks on this survey is 40% higher than last November's record low of 958,000, slightly lower than the most recent 5-year average (1.43 million), and well below the long-term November average of 2 million ducks. Compared to November 2008, there were more diving ducks (40,000 vs 19,000) and mottled ducks (70,000 vs 51,000) and about the same number of gadwalls, but estimates for all other species except blue-winged teal were lower than last year. The 598,000 estimated blue-winged teal is nearly 5 times the long-term November average of 125,000 for this species and surpasses the previous record high

of 586,000 estimated in 1973. The difference in estimated blue-wings (598,000 vs 113,000) accounts for almost all of the difference between this and last November's survey totals. Without the large increase in numbers of blue-wings, this survey would have been lower than last year's record low.

The distribution of ducks in coastal Louisiana was skewed toward the west with over 85% of the ducks seen on the southwest transects. Probably due to very high water levels in the coastal marsh and higher-than-normal shallow flooding in the agricultural areas just north of the marsh, the majority of ducks were counted in the flooded agricultural areas. Large concentrations both on and off the transect lines were observed in the fields south of Welsh over to southwest of Crowley, and a very large group of mostly blue-wings was encountered north of Intracoastal City. Indeed, the large number of blue-wings seen on this survey were in a relatively few scattered concentrations in southwest Louisiana. Southeast Louisiana had fewer total ducks than last November (170,000 vs 200,000) and Catahoula Lake hosted very few ducks because of very high water levels. We had received reports of good numbers of ducks around Delacroix and in a few areas near the mouth of the Mississippi River prior to the survey, but saw disappointing numbers there possibly due to the storm surge from tropical storm Ida.

An additional 123,000 ducks and 49,000 geese (60% snow, 40% white-fronted) were counted in select habitats of northeast Louisiana. That is about half of the geese and 14% fewer ducks than seen in the same areas in November 2008. This is the fewest geese counted on the northeast Louisiana survey in last 5 years. Extensive flooding was seen in the Ouachita River, Bayou Lafourche, and Boeuf River drainages inundating agricultural fields in some areas, but overall there was not widespread flooding of fields across much of the northeast survey area. The largest concentrations of birds were noted at Delta and Saline Farms near Catahoula Lake and in the flooded fields west of Hebert. Otherwise birds were scattered throughout the region on managed water. Pintails were the most abundant species followed by gadwalls, mallards, and green-winged teal.

We counted another 5,250 ducks on an abbreviated northwest Louisiana survey, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River. This is less than half the number of ducks seen on the last 4 November surveys, but Toledo Bend reservoir and a few other traditionally surveyed areas were missed due to problems scheduling aircraft. Still, observers reported seeing fewer ducks than expected due to major flooding that was occurring along the Red River and its tributaries and some lakes and oxbows associated with the Red River because of record rainfall for October. Ring-necked ducks were the most abundant species, accounting for nearly half the ducks counted.

Prior to the record rainfall in October and resulting flooding at Catahoula Lake, major river systems, and the coastal marshes, habitat conditions for migrating and wintering waterfowl looked to be very good. Excellent crops of seed-producing annual vegetation were seen at Catahoula Lake and across the marshes of southwest Louisiana, and good growth of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) was seen across the coast compared to the recent past. The early rain and flooding has increased habitat available in agricultural areas and likely will result in excellent water levels in swamps and forested wetland areas. However, consistent with recent November surveys, this survey suggests fewer ducks have migrated into the state than in the past to take advantage of those habitats. Temperatures have been above normal in northern areas of the Mississippi and Central Flyways, and the flooding we have seen in Louisiana has also occurred further north. Wet conditions have delayed harvest of crops and created additional habitat for ducks that may slow the migration into Louisiana.